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SUBJECT: POLLS INDICATE PUBLIC DISAFFECTION WITH LABOUR BECOMING
EMBEDDED

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Recent political polling indicates the emergence of an embedded trend against the ruling Labour Party as it struggles to close the sizeable gap in popularity with the rival opposition National Party. Buttressing this trend is Labour Party leader and Prime Minister Helen Clark's diminished personal polling versus the popular National Party leader, John Key. Although the next election is not scheduled until late 2008, the polls suggest the mood of the electorate appears to be increasingly hardening against Labour and Clark herself. End Summary

Polls shows mood against Labour and Clark entrenched

¶2. (SBU) NZ political poll results over past months indicate that a trend is developing against the current Government as it struggles against the growing popularity of the National Party and its adroit leader, John Key. Although the next scheduled election is a year away, the net effect of Labour's inability to close National's sizable lead in party polling and Helen Clark's diminished personal standing is a growing sense of a difficult-to-reverse hardening of the electorate's mood against Labour.

¶2. (SBU) Key, who only became party leader in November 2006, is firmly affixed as New Zealand most popular politician. Key's first overtook Clark in preferred Prime Minister polling in May this year, after eight years of dominance in the poll by Clark. This change at the top of preferred Prime Minister polling is highly symbolic since it places the new leader ahead of a long-established one thereby removing the aura of invincibility which has surrounded Clark since she took office in 1999. It signals that she is now politically vulnerable.

Results of latest polling

¶3. (SBU) The latest Colmar Brunton-One News poll (July 8th) underlined the difficulty that the ruling Labour Party is having in winning back the large lead built up by the National Party over the past couple of months. This poll shows National at 52% and Labour at 36%, virtually unchanged since the last survey in early May. The most recent 3 News-TNS political poll (July 11th) has National at 48% and Labour at 36%, a finding that is unchanged since the last poll in early May. In the past Labour took consolation in the "3 News-TNS" poll results which consistently placed it ahead of National thus bucking the trend. Now, not only is this poll in tune with the other major political polls, it forecasts a possible change in the political guard. Although the July 23rd release of New Zealand's third major political poll, the Herald DigiPoll, showed that Labour ticked up slightly in the last month it still faces a challenge to overtake National with 48.5% favorable support (Note: This poll showed that Labour improved by taking numbers away from smaller parties rather than eating into National's lead. End Note)

¶4. (SBU) Comment: While many voters may admire Clark's steadfast political abilities and management skills, they have never really warmed to her personally. Key is also admired for exhibiting these

same professional traits, but unlike Clark he represents other qualities that endear him more to the average New Zealander. Key's advantage lies in the perception that he does not fit the mold of a career politician because he previously had a successful career in the private sector. While Clark on the other hand, has been a career politician practically her entire professional life. In the past Clark's childlessness has been exploited by political opponents but Key is not likely to resort to this tactic overtly. Key's family life (he is married with three children) and an innate understanding of what it takes to raise a family are important prerequisites to most voters, especially women which accounts for his consistently strong polling results. End Comment.

Keegan